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Weak characterization scuttles Small Craft

By JACK KAPICA
of The Gazette

For all of Tennessee Williams' reputation as a great American playwright, his Small Craft Warnings does not stand as one of his better plays.

The strangled cry of catharsis — which rips through works like Suddenly Last Summer and A Streetcar Named Desire — is nothing more than a burble in this languish one-act melodrama.

What it relies on for quality is Williams' ability to create tender and brittle relationships among sad and lonely people — and that quality is certainly missing from the production it is currently receiving at the Revue Theatre under the direction of Arleigh Peterson.

Small Craft Warnings takes place in a greasy California beachfront dive called Monk's Place, where a group of local misfits and losers are forced together out of mutual misery and the fog outside.

Among these lost small craft are a soiled prostitute called Violet, a beachboy who believes his penis will earn his living for him, an aging homosexual writer and his squeaky-clean boyfriend and a ruined doctor. There are also a confused waiter and a barkeep with a heart of gold.

And, as in most of Williams' plays, there is the smart-mouth bitch who gets her jollies telling everyone the horrible truth about themselves.

Nothing happens in Monk's Place — people come and go, rough each other up emotionally, and then when the dust is settled, everything remains the same.

In order to make this boredom work as a piece of theatre, each character must be etched in acid lines, and the whole production steeped in the gloom of lost innocence.

LITTLE DEPTH

If director Peterson had followed this method, his production would surely have fared considerably better. But for the most part, the production shows little evidence of carefully thought-out characterization.

Only three of the eight characters are shown in any depth. Ruth Thomas' whore Violet is a stock Williamsian wilted Southern belle, complete down to the broad accent, splayed knees and caked-on makeup. Tim Chapman, as the befuddled waiter Steve, has enough of the naive idealist about him to make him stand out. And Charles Cobb does well enough as the homosexual writer Quentin, even if his mannerisms are a bit forced.

The rest, however, don't fare as well.

It takes a while to realize that the truth-telling bitch Leona, played lustily if not accurately by Julie Wildman, is a drunk. The washed-up doctor, played by Mark Walker, looks far too young and handsome to be the ratty old sot he's supposed to be. And Mickey Pascal just doesn't cut it as a pouncy beach bum with his thick Quebecois accent.

One thing can help this production — considerably more rehearsal. The lack of characterization affects the timing, which in turn results in multitudinous flubbed lines.

It is certainly a pity, because there is enough talent up on the stage to make it work.

AP wirephoto

Once more unto ...

Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor re-married last Friday in a mud-but African village in remote Botswana, it was reported yesterday. The couple — who were married in Montreal in 1964 and divorced last year — celebrated the event with champagne on the banks of the Chobe River, watched by two rhinos and a hippo. The actors remarried by special license granted by local district commissioner Ambrose Masalela, who also performed the simple 20-minute ceremony. "They were very excited but composed," he said. The Burtons were reconciled in Switzerland — where this picture was taken — in August. During a recent interview, the couple called their divorce "the most ridiculous in history."

Gazette, Michael Dugas

Record Run

Monologuist Yvon Deschamps opened an unprecedented two-month engagement in Theatre Maisonneuve of Place des Arts last night. Deschamps, a top star here, is widely loved for his wry comments on life in Quebec.

Sound effects added

Pair takes mime a step further

By DANE LANKEN
of The Gazette

Mime is taken a step further by the two young Montreal actors who call themselves Les Mimes Electriques and who opened a three-week engagement last night at Le Patriote en haut, 1474 St. Catherine East.

Their addition to the ancient art is sound. And it that makes you think that mime with sound is not mime, understand that the sounds this pair adds are not normal human sounds, but grunts and whoosh that are as exaggerated — yet as significant — as their motions.

Sitting at the electric typewriter, for instance, finds Les Mimes not only aping the hand movements, but imitating — with disarming accuracy — the very sounds of an electric typewriter.

Similarly, an outing in a motor boat involves not only the familiar motions of starting it, but also its familiar put-put.

WORLD

Actually, you could say that this duo has taken mime two steps forward, because their mime takes in not only the movements of humans, but equally their effects and the action in the world around them.

For instance, a man spits. The lips of the mime go through the action, and then his hand traces out the projectile — while his vocal cords produce the appropriate 'ptui' and 'splat.'

What does it all add up to? A show that for the first half-hour sets you marvelling at the wit and imagination of these two actors. It is that clever.

The motions and the sounds come so fast that you just sit there smiling, taking it all in and — as I said — marvelling at the thought and planning and practice the two must have put into their show.

The evening opens with a pair of secretaries at their electric typewriters, alternately typing, smiling at the office beaus and taking coffee breaks.

INJURIES

It moves through a fight, comic book style, with popping eyeballs and Don Martin-style (Mad Magazine) injuries. There's a car ride in there too, that starts with the pair sitting in the car, testing the power windows (remember, sound and motion) and then getting carried away by all the gadgets at their disposal.

The pair — Patrice Arbour and Bernard Caree — also play pilots (lots of sounds here), a visit to the doctor the routinely puts the Medicare card through three times), bus/river, duck hunter and spacemen on the moon.

International potential

Contraction is remarkable

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ
for The Gazette

Contraction has been one of Quebec's most original rock groups for the past three years — yet they always floundered when it came to staging their music.

Finally, this week at the Eveche club of the Hotel Nelson, the group is making its first serious attempt at taking their remarkable music to the people.

Contraction is one of the few local groups with international potential. This is no mickey-mouse, ye-ye jouaized outfit. These musicians are serious, and they are creating their own indelible niche in the realm of "progressive-rock."

Led by singer Christiane Robichaud, bassist Yves Laterriere, and guitarist Robert Stanley, Contraction is developing a strong and elegant sound. Their compositions feature soaring structures, modulated with a sensual ear.

Although their music has been around in the form of two excellent albums — Contraction, and La bourse ou la vie — the group's problems stemmed from nervousness on stage. Their music must be performed with precision as well as inspiration, and numerous hassles prevented this from happening in the past.

On stage they froze — and only a six-month stint with Ville Emard Blues Band kept them around.

Now at the Eveche, with their albums' engineer Jules Perotte behind the mixing board, Contraction is burning with a fine taut multi-layered sound.

Robichaud is singing with considerably more confidence. She has pioneered the wordless vocalese that's so popular among female singers in the province, and she is the only one to carry off this ethereal style with success. She sets a mood for the rest of the group, backed by Laferriere's methodical bass lines which lead them in time.

Stanley, the legendary 'Plaie' amongst local guitarists, possesses a glittering personal style. He has a small wirey countenance, his eyes riveted towards his axe, and he seems to play always on the edge. He's both gritty and mathematical — to me, he is one of the most fascinating guitarists around.

The rest of the group conveys a lightness unprecedented in Contraction's stop-and-go career. How these musicians play with such a melodic approach to hard rhythm!

The group has never been more relaxed on stage (although the nervousness is still apparent), and they seem in a good frame of mind to make their presence felt in the progressive rock realm of Zappa, Gentle Giant, Weather Report, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, et al. If you don't catch them at the refurbished Eveche (with a much improved sound system), they're at the Cinema Outremont on Nov. 21.

Ballet grant

Jean-Paul L'Allier, the Quebec minister of cultural affairs, yesterday announced his department has awarded Les Grands Ballets Canadiens a grant of $200,000.

The grant is to cover operating expenses for the Montreal-based troupe for the fiscal year 1975-76.

Last year's grant was $200,000.

I Do! does the job

By TOM SCURFIELD
for The Gazette

While love and marriage may go together like a horse and carriage, it is also true nothing is more fatal to a love affair than the words 'I Do.'

Youthful romantic love can't stand the realities of children, fame and plain old boredom as the years go by. The icy fingers up and down the spine are replaced by warm hands soothing aches and a growing together as the years go by.

Jan de Hartog examined this growing relationship between two people in his play The Fourposter some years ago. Tom Jones (not the pop-singer) and Harvey Schmidt adapted de Hartog's play into a musical called "I Do! I Do!."

While much of the meat of the original play and the superbly sentimental ending have been dropped in the musical version, I Do! I Do! stands on its own as a warm, loving look at two very human people trying to live together.

Phoenix Theatre opened their 1975-76 season last night with a good production of I Do! I Do! Starring Sheila Ross and Greg Peterson, this is the second show to be staged in the Phoenix Theatres's permanent home in the Town of Mount Royal.

This intimate theatre — it only seats 85 — is located above a pharmacy at the corner of Laird and Canora, across from the TMR station. Although it was quite hot and the chairs were quite hard, it is a splendid little theatre with almost a cabaret atmosphere.

Sheila Ross is excellent as Agnes, moving easily from bride, to mother, to — at the end — a wonderful old lady. She has a superb voice and a wonderful comedic sense.

Greg Peterson, although very good, doesn't match Ross' performance. He sings and dances well, but the role of Michael never comes to life — and at the end he still sounds and moves like a young man.

Maxim Mazumdar has paced the show very well and Charles Homewood's musical direction is fine.

The physical side of the production isn't handled as well. Karla Haug's costumes lack the sense of the various periods. The set, while adequate, doesn't change over the fifty year period, and doesn't really give the performers the necessary support.

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Money malaise is musicians' tune

If the Montreal Symphony faced some difficult moments at the opening of its season last month, it was not the only orchestra in trouble.

There seems to be a general malaise among orchestral musicians that has come to the surface during contract negotiations this fall.

The most dramatic example of the effect of a strike by musical performers was the closing of Broadway musicals for over three weeks, which had all of Broadway shivering nervously in the dark.

In Pittsburgh, for example, musicians have just rejected a $90-a-week increase. In Baltimore musicians have just accepted a $56 increase.

The National Arts Centre has just announced the cancellation of the visit to Ottawa of the Detroit Symphony, because of the uncertainty of contract negotiations in Detroit.

And musicians in Chicago, San Francisco, Denver and Cleveland have also engaged in strike activity recently.

Montreal is at the mid-point of a 30 day cooling off period during which negotiations are supposedly taking place with the assistance of a government appointed mediator.

Are musicians grieving themselves right out of business, like so many other powerful unions of the 1930s? Time alone will tell.

Music
By Jacob Siskind

HANS SWAROWSKY

News has reached here from Vienna of the passing of Hans Swarowsky.

Montrealers will recall that Swarowsky was a frequent guest conductor of the Montreal Symphony in the early 1960s, the period when Zubin Mehta was the musical director of the orchestra. Swarowsky did not have an extensive career internationally but his influence was considerable.

A pupil of Schoenberg and Webern (he studied conducting with the latter), he was perhaps best known outside Vienna as the one conducting teacher who developed pupils who achieved international acclaim. Zubin Mehta, Claudio Abbado and Seiji Ozawa are only three of the present generation of active conductors to have graduated from his class.

It is interesting that while the Viennese downgraded Webern,...s efforts as a conductor, his dramatically intense style of drawing sound from an orchestra seems to have colored the music making of the present time.

Swarowsky made a number of recordings, but his true musical legacy is the conducting school he founded. It is perhaps most important because all of its graduates emerged with distinct personalities of their own. Like all great teachers, he did not attempt to produce musical sausages.

THIS SOLOIST IS BASS

When Gary Karr performs as soloist with the McGill Chamber Orchestra on Monday evening, the world's leading double bass virtuoso will be doing his favorite thing.

In a recent interview he revealed the reason for his fascination with and love for his instrument.

"I think of the double bass as a sex symbol. It is a gutsy, sexy instrument that looks, sounds and feels sensual. You can be turned on by the sensual vibrations of this huge, moving mass. As a student at Juilliard we had free-string basses, the kind the Berlin Philharmonic have — and they are absolutely phallic, bigger to finger, sex-symbols. I took it in hand and held it against me and bowed the low C and was turned on all over again."

Bass players have been saying this in private for years. Now Karr has let it all hang out.

Incidentally, Karr spent several years teaching in the elementary and secondary school systems in Halifax — with great success.

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